

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



||| A PRESBYTERIAN JOURNAL DEVOTED TO STATING, DEFENDING
AND FURTHERING THE GOSPEL IN THE MODERN WORLD |||

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Published monthly by
THE PRESBYTERIAN AND
REFORMED PUBLISHING CO.,
501 Witherspoon Bldg., Phila., Pa.

MAY, 1930
Vol. 1 No. 1

\$1.00 A YEAR
EVERYWHERE

By Way of Preface

CHRISTIANITY TODAY will be edited from the viewpoint of those who hold that Christianity as it exists throughout the world, in as far as it is not Christianity falsely so-called, is essentially one with Christianity as it is authoritatively set forth in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and as it has been confessed through all the Christian centuries.

This means, in the judgment of its editors, that what is known as evangelical Christianity is a purer and more adequate expression of Christianity than what is known as "Catholic" Christianity. It means, also, according to the same judgment, that what arrogates to itself the name of Modernism, in all its consistent forms of expression, is not Christianity at all.

CHRISTIANITY TODAY has been established to state, defend and further the system of thought and life taught in the Bible—a system of thought and life which in the judgment of its editors has found its most complete and most carefully guarded as well as its most vital expression in the standards of the Presbyterian Church.

It seems to us that there is an imperative need of such a paper, most of all within the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. inasmuch as the recent change of policy on the part of *The Presbyterian* means that there is now no paper within this great church that is committed to a militant defense of its faith against its enemies—whether within or without its borders. But while the more immediate occasion for starting this paper is the recent change of policy on the part of *The Presbyterian*, it is the situation

throughout the Church-at-large that calls most insistently for its establishment. We refer to that wide-spread defection from Christianity which is so obvious a phenomenon in the age in which we live—a defection rooted in the so-called "Enlightenment" of the 18th century with its thorough-going naturalism of thought and sentiment but which within the last fifty years has assumed such proportions throughout Europe and America that the enemies of Christianity have gathered courage to contest the right of historic Christianity (which is supernatural to the core) to dominate the culture and civilization of the future. Wholly apart from what has happened in connection with *The Presbyterian* and wholly apart from what may be the future of *The Presbyterian* we believe there is an imperative need for such a paper as CHRISTIANITY TODAY aspires to be. This paper will fail of its purpose if it does not prove helpful not only to Presbyterians but to Christians everywhere in maintaining their heritage in the face of encroaching Modernism and in transmitting it undiminished to those who shall come after them.

But while the viewpoint of its editors will be that of the Calvinistic rather than that of the Lutheran or Arminian Churches there will be the full recognition of the fact that what they hold in common with other evangelical Christians is much more important than what they hold in distinction from them. In fact while they will be as unflinchingly opposed to Rome as were their fathers they will not be blind to the fact that as the lines are drawn today—theism over against

atheism; Christ the God-man over against the man Jesus; the cross as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice over against the cross as a symbol of self-sacrifice; salvation as a divine gift over against salvation as a human achievement; the Bible as the revealed Word of God over against the Bible as a purely human product; the moral law as a divinely imposed rule of life over against the moral law as an ever-changing resultant of human insight and experience—Rome, at the points at which the battle rages most fiercely today, is our ally rather than our opponent.

An additional reason for establishing this paper is the fact that Westminster Theological Seminary has been founded in Philadelphia to carry on and perpetuate the policies and traditions of Princeton Theological Seminary as it existed prior to its reorganization by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. We rejoice in this event as we look upon it as the most hopeful and encouraging event for the future of the Presbyterian Church and evangelical Christianity that has happened for many a day. As matters now stand, however, this institution lacks the support of any paper, in the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. at least, that has a really sympathetic understanding of the things for which it stands. While CHRISTIANITY TODAY is not connected in any official way with Westminster Seminary it hopes to be of use in furthering its interests—along with those of other institutions that stand four-square for the Bible and the gospel it contains.

CHRISTIANITY TODAY will not only be free of all ecclesiastical control but its editors will be free to determine its char-

Books of Religious Significance

THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF CHRIST by J. Gresham Machen, D.D., Litt.D., Professor of New Testament in Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia. Harper & Brothers, New York and London. 1930. 415 pp. \$5.00.

THIS volume sustains, and more than sustains, Dr. Machen's reputation as not only one of the world's foremost New Testament scholars but as one of the ablest defenders of historic Christianity. His former books, *The Origin of Paul's Religion* (1921), *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923) and *What is Faith?* (1925), have so whetted the appetites of their thousands of readers that the announcement of a new book by Dr. Machen fills them with eager expectancy—whatever may be their theological position. It will be recalled that Mr. Walter Lippmann, whose theological position is about as far removed as possible from that of Dr. Machen's, in his widely read book, *A Preface to Morals*, not only speaks of Dr. Machen as "both a scholar and a gentleman" but says of his book, *Christianity and Liberalism*: "It is an admirable book. For its acumen, for its saliency, and for its wit, this cool and stringent defense of orthodox Protestantism is, I think, the best popular argument produced by either side in the current controversy. We shall do well to listen to Dr. Machen."

Dr. Machen's latest book, it is true, like *The Origin of Paul's Religion*, moves throughout in the field of exact scholarship. It would be difficult to point to a book anywhere that is more thorough-going in its recital and examination of all that bears upon the subject with which it deals. But while this is the case, Dr. Machen writes so simply and lucidly that men and women of intelligence everywhere, whatever their standing as technical scholars, will be able to read it with understanding and profit. Certainly no minister or Bible teacher of adults can afford to ignore this book. To the reviewer at least it is a source of much satisfaction to know that what is confessedly the most exhaustive and most scholarly book on the problem of the Virgin Birth of Christ ever published, at least in English, has been written by a man who after having acquainted himself with everything of importance that has been written on the subject since the first century, no matter in what language, holds to the historic belief of the Christian Church that its founder was born without human father, being conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary.

It is impossible in the space at our disposal to do more than indicate the contents of this book—a book that is all but certain to remain the standard book on the subject for many years to come.

Dr. Machen begins by pointing out that whatever we may think of the virgin birth as a historic fact we cannot deny that the historic Christian Church has all but universally held to the belief that Christ was virgin born. How shall we account for this belief? The simplest and most adequate explanation would be to say that the Church was led to so believe because Christ was actually so born. Such an explanation, however, involves recourse to the supernatural in the form of the miraculous and unquestionably there is an enormous presumption against any human being having ever been born without human father. If an adequate explanation of this belief were available that did not involve the miraculous it is quite certain that it would quickly supplant the explanation just mentioned. Not the least valuable part of Dr. Machen's book (Chapters XII-XIV) is his discussion of the theories that have been advanced to give a naturalistic explanation of the origin of the Church's belief in the virgin birth. In this connection he shows, quite successfully we think, that all such efforts including the vulgar rationalistic and the dominant mythical whether on the basis of Jewish or pagan ideas—have been failures and that "if the doctrine of the virgin birth of Christ did not originate in fact, modern critical investigation has at any rate not yet succeeded in showing how it did originate." The mere fact, however, that no adequate naturalistic explanation of the origin of the Church's belief in the virgin birth has been advanced notwithstanding the fact that the best efforts of modern scholarship have been devoted to the question, does not of itself warrant our holding that the belief originated in fact. At this point Dr. Machen steers midway between the position of Vincent Taylor according to which the failure of the "alternative theories" weighs but little in favor of the historic explanation and that of H. R. Mackintosh according to which the strongest argument in favor of the historicity of the virgin birth is the difficulty of accounting for it on any other assumption. He holds that the failure of modern scholarship to offer an adequate naturalistic explanation of the origin of this belief to be exceedingly significant and yet that our own acceptance of the virgin birth as a fact must rest on positive evidence if it is to be at all well-grounded, inasmuch as it is at least conceivable that this belief originated in some manner beyond the reach of modern research. In harmony with this position the major portion of Dr. Machen's books has to do with the direct evidence in favor of the notion that the early Church was led to believe in the virgin birth for the simple reason that Jesus was actually born of a virgin.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the thoroughness of Dr. Machen's examination of the positive testimony to the virgin birth as an historic fact together with the objections that

have been raised against this testimony. He begins by showing that even if the New Testament were silent in regard to the matter the second-century testimony makes clear that in the early years of that century all parts of the Christian Church regarded the virgin birth as an essential Christian belief, and that while there were denials of the virgin birth even within that century yet, without exception, they were based on philosophical or dogmatic rather than historical considerations. As a matter of fact, of course, the New Testament does contain accounts of the virgin birth that were written well before the close of the first century and which constitute our earliest testimony to the virgin birth. As they have come down to us there can be no doubt that the birth narratives of Luke and Matthew represent the Church's belief in the virgin birth as based on fact. Hence the many and determined efforts that have been made to break the force of their testimony by attempting to show that these birth narratives did not belong to these gospels in their original forms or that the verses in these narratives that bear direct witness to the virgin birth are later interpolations. Dr. Machen examines these attempts in all their ramifications and shows (1) that the infancy narratives both in Matthew and Luke are not later additions but original parts of those Gospels (2) that in their original forms they both really contain accounts of the virgin birth as something that actually happened and (3) that they are strikingly Jewish, Christian and Palestinian in both form and contents (a consideration that weighs heavily against those who seek a pagan origin for the Church's belief in the virgin birth). Dr. Machen next deals with the effort to weaken the testimony of both Matthew and Luke by alleging that they contradict each other, his conclusion being that in Matthew and Luke we have two completely independent but not contradictory accounts of the birth and infancy of Jesus. This is followed by an examination of the efforts made to discredit the trustworthiness of these narratives (1) on the ground that they are inherently incredible because of their supernaturalism (2) on the ground that they contain representations, like the reference to the census of Quirinius, which do not accord with what we learn from secular history and (3) that they are contradicted by what is either implied or stated in other parts of the New Testament. He has little difficulty in disposing of the second and third of the objections to the virgin birth just mentioned. But what about the first of the objections just mentioned?

In dealing with the objection to the virgin birth based upon the fact that it would involve the actuality of a miraculous event Dr. Machen does not avail himself of a reduced definition of "miracle" or of the distinction between the

virgin birth as a matter of "faith" and a matter of "history." He says flatly: "If the virgin birth is a fact at all, by whatever means it may be established, it is a fact of history." Moreover the virgin birth represents for him "the beginning of a new era in the course of the universe, a true entrance of the creative power of God, in sharp distinction from the order of nature." He freely admits, therefore, that if miracles (as thus defined) have never happened and never can happen, then, in the nature of the case, the virgin birth as reported in the Gospels cannot be historical. What he maintains is that enormous as is the presumption against supposing that at a designated point in history there has been an intrusion, into the order of nature, of the creative power of God, this presumption has been gloriously overcome in the case of Jesus Christ. He maintains indeed that even as an isolated event the evidence for the virgin birth is so strong that the story of the virgin birth is an aid rather than an obstacle to Christian faith, but at the same time he holds the evidence in its favor is sufficient to overcome the presumption against the occurrence of such an event only when it is taken in connection with the entire phenomenon of Jesus' life and particularly with the evidence of his resurrection, and so seen to be an organic part of God's mighty work of redemption. "The real question," he writes, "is whether Jesus Christ was just a man like the rest of men, or a heavenly being, the eternal Son of God, come voluntarily to earth for our redemption. Once admit the absolute uniqueness of Jesus, admit not merely that he was one who has not as a matter of fact been surpassed, but that He was one who can never by any possibility be surpassed, and you have taken the really decisive step. But if you take that step, you should have no difficulty in accepting the exultant supernaturalism of the New Testament narratives as they stand." This means in effect that modern denials of the virgin birth like those of the second century are based on philosophical or dogmatic rather than historical considerations.

The volume concludes with a chapter of singular power dealing with the question of the importance of belief in the virgin birth to the Christian man. He points out that the denial of the virgin birth involves a rejection of the authority of the Bible as ordinarily understood; and as over against those who hold that the Bible is an authority in the sphere of ideals but not in the sphere of external facts, he points out that this distinction can be carried out only by representing Christianity as a very different sort of religion than it as a matter of fact is. "What is this modern religion," he asks, "that is founded upon a Bible whose authority is altogether in the sphere of inspiration and not at all in the sphere of external fact? Is it not a religion whose fundamental tenet is the ability of man to save himself?" He further points out the importance of the virgin birth as a test to apply to ourselves and others to determine whether we really hold a naturalistic or a supernaturalistic view of the person of Christ; also how incomplete our knowledge of our Saviour

would be if the New Testament had not told us of the virgin birth; also how important it is because of its bearing upon the question of the solidarity of the race in the guilt and power of sin. His conclusion in this connection is that even if belief in the virgin birth is not necessary in order to constitute one a Christian it is necessary to Christianity and to the corporate witness which the Church should bear to Christianity.

We have sought to indicate the range and scope of this important volume, but nothing short of an examination of the volume itself will apprise the reader of the cogency of its defense of the virgin birth as an historic fact. It is customary in many circles today to allege that only those destitute of real scholarship believe that Jesus was virgin born but here is a volume produced by a workman that needeth not to be ashamed in any scholastic gathering who holds that it is indeed true that Jesus was born without a human father, being conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. An excellent index adds much to the value of the volume. When it is considered that the volume contains more than 200,000 words, with paper, print and binding leaving nothing to be desired, its price cannot be considered large.

S. G. C.

THE THEOLOGY OF CRISIS by H. Emil Brunner, Professor of Theology, University of Zurich. Charles Scribner's Sons. Pp. 113. Price \$1.75.

THIS is a small but significant book. For some time we have been hearing of a new theological movement in Europe under the leadership of Karl Barth, H. Emil Brunner, Friedrich Gogarten, Eduard Thurneysen and others—a movement which was said to be "fundamental without being fundamentalist" and even a "resurgence of Calvinism" and to have captured the attention of the ministers and Churches of the Continent to a large degree. The first direct knowledge of this movement that was afforded the English reader was provided in a translation by Douglas Horton of a series of addresses by Karl Barth and published under the title of *The Word of God and the Word of Man*. That book, however, proved to be somewhat difficult reading and not readily understandable with the result that probably few of its readers derived from it any very clear conception of just what the nature of *The Theology of Crisis* is. In this respect Dr. Brunner's book is a decided improvement over Dr. Barth's. It has the advantage of having been prepared for an American audience as it consists of a series of five lectures that were first delivered at the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church at Lancaster, Pa., and repeated in part at Princeton, Harvard, Hartford, Union and other seminaries. Moreover as Dr. Brunner had enjoyed the advantage of study as a Fellow in Union Theological Seminary in 1919-1920 he has a better understanding of the mind and speech of the religious thinkers of America than if he had spent his whole life in Germany. The

result is a book which while it bears the stamp of German rather than of American thinking does really serve to introduce *The Theology of Crisis* to its American audience. The brevity of the book is such that many questions that arise remain unanswered but at the same time those who desire some intelligible information concerning the Barthian School of Theology will not consult this little book in vain. We can do little more than indicate some of the characteristics of the Barthian movement as this book reveals them.

An outstanding characteristic of the Barthian movement is its critical attitude toward the Modernists. Dr. Brunner says roundly: "A fundamentalist, possessed of a reasonably correct knowledge of Christianity, will have little difficulty in proving that the modernist teaches, under the label of Christianity, a religion which has nothing in common with Christianity except a few words, and that these words cover concepts which are irreconcilable with the content of Christian faith" (p. 9); also, "Fundamentalist criticism has justified its thesis, negatively and positively, that modernism can no longer be called Christianity" (p. 13). Such satisfaction as the fundamentalists derive from Dr. Brunner's criticism of the modernists is greatly lessened, however, by the fact that he is only less critical of the fundamentalists themselves. He speaks of fundamentalism as "an imposing mediaeval form of orthodoxy" and says that "fundamentalism and orthodoxy in general are a petrification of Christianity" (p. 14). At the same time he does not indulge in that cheap criticism of fundamentalism so common among so many who have but a fraction of his knowledge. Speaking of Fundamentalism he says:

"Among the leaders of this movement, both in Europe and America, there are so many scholarly and devout men that it is a sheer snap-judgment to explain their theology as due to mere traditionalism or conservatism. In this way neither the essence of their movement nor the mental forces behind it are truly valued. These men, notwithstanding their one-sidedness and certain traits of close-mindedness, leave the impression that they stand for a great dynamic truth, by which they live and which they must not lose if they are not to lose their best" (p. 9).

The significance of Dr. Brunner's relatively favorable critique of Fundamentalism as compared with Modernism can be adequately appreciated only as it is remembered that he began his theological career as a Ritschlian and hence that he represents a movement away from Modernism and toward Fundamentalism. While from the viewpoint of what he calls "fundamentalism or orthodoxy" he has not yet arrived, it is a satisfaction to know that, broadly speaking, he has been moving in the right direction.

What ever may be thought of the adequacy or inadequacy of the Barthian movement it represents a plea for serious theological thinking. It is really a theological movement. It does not exhaust itself in the study of the history of religion or the psychology or philosophy of religion. It properly defines theology as the